

Primary Source

Memoire of Alexander Ross regarding
June 19, 1816 Battle of Seven Oaks

The approach of the enemy was announced by the women and children of the settlers, who were seen running from place to place in alarm, seeking protection and crying out that the settlers were made prisoners.

On this, it appears, Governor Semple,* who was Governor-in-Chief of the Hudson's Bay Company's territories, with several other gentlemen and attendants, walked out to meet the strangers, now discerned to be a party of half-breeds and Indians, all mounted and armed. Their hostile purpose being manifest, the Governor and his party halted, and were seen in a group as if consulting together, while the Indians and half-breeds divided themselves into two bodies, and instantly commenced firing from the shelter afforded by a few willows; first a shot or two, and then a merciless volley.

The party of Governor Semple, consisting of twenty-eight persons, was completely surrounded, and of that number no less than twenty-one were killed: namely, Mr. Semple, the Governor; Captain Rogers, mineralogist; Mr. White, the surgeon; Mr. McLean, the principal settler; Lieutenant Holt, of the Swedish navy; Mr. Wilkinson, the Governor's secretary, and fifteen men; besides which, Mr. J.P. Bourke, the storekeeper, of whom we shall have to speak hereafter, was wounded, but saved himself by flight.

The unhallowed triumph of the murderers was complete. Only one of their number fell in the battle as they called it, and one other, we believe, was wounded, while the colonists who survived the massacre, were ordered once more to leave their homes without farther warning or preparation, on pain of being hunted down and shot like wild beasts, if they should ever appear there again.

It is doubtful, indeed, whether one innocent head would have been spared; and that any escaped was due to the generosity and heroism of Mr. Grant, the chief of the hostile party, who rushed before his own people, and at the imminent peril of his life kept them at bay, and saved the remnant of the settlers from extirpation.

Their houses, however, were ransacked, their goods pillaged, and the whole colony driven into exile. They again found a refuge at Jack River, now called Norway House, situated at the northern extremity of Lake Winnipeg."

Author: Alexander Ross

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